

Washington, DC—Today, Representative Elijah E. Cummings, Ranking Member of the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, joined Representatives Judy Chu, Mike Honda, and other House Members in introducing legislation to prevent hazing in our armed services. The Harry Lew Military Hazing Accountability and Prevention Act of 2012 would:

1. Create a national database to track hazing incidents and help the military determine their causes;
2. Provide a statutory definition of hazing in the Uniform Code of Military Justice to ensure that hazing is a prosecutable crime;
3. Require an independent GAO study on each of the services' hazing training and prevention policies along with the prevalence and consequences of hazing over the last five years; and
4. Require the Department of Defense to develop a comprehensive plan to address hazing throughout the armed services.

The lawmakers released the following statements about their bill:

Congressman Elijah Cummings (MD-07): "Hazing is simply intolerable and has no place in our military. Now is the time for our military leadership to take decisive action to address and prevent such violent acts against our servicemembers, and to continue to create a culture of diversity that represents and celebrates the richness of our nation."

Congresswoman Judy Chu (CA-32): "I lost my nephew, Lance Cpl Harry Lew, to military hazing in April of last year. Since that day, the military has been a perpetual disappointment – both in failing to deliver justice for Harry's death and in their lack of attention to hazing within their ranks. Since the moment I began speaking out about this abuse in our armed services, the military has maintained that they don't have a problem – that they are handling this issue perfectly. How can they claim they are doing everything perfectly if they don't even have anti-hazing policies or training? How can they know they are doing everything perfectly if they don't even know how many people are hazed? They can't. And that's exactly why we're introducing this bill. We are taking action because it has become abundantly clear over the past year that the military won't. This is about committing to protect our troops, just as our troops have committed to protect the America people. It's about time something is done before

another service member is harmed in such a preventable way.”

Congressman Mike Honda (CA-15): “Learning from the tragic cases of Marine Lance Corporal Harry Lew and Army Private Danny Chen, we must act now to ensure that the Department of Defense has effective hazing and harassment prevention and accountability policies. A recent hearing by the House Armed Services Subcommittee on Military Personnel helped to identify the lack of a simple definition for hazing and harassment across the Services, much less a comprehensive prevention policy. This bill would provide the Pentagon with the necessary tools to effectively address the problem of hazing and harassment in the military, in order to guarantee that our brave service members are able to safely and honorably defend the citizens and the Constitution of the United States.”

BACKGROUND: On March 6, Cummings, Senator Ben Cardin, and the Congressional Tri-Caucus (Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus, Black Caucus, and Hispanic Caucus) held a forum on military hazing and diversity in the armed services and the Coast Guard. The forum, and a later hearing held by the House Armed Services Committee on March 22, revealed several deficiencies and a lack of a coordinated response by the Department of Defense and the Coast Guard to deter, address, and track hazing incidents.

The case of Lance Cpl. Harry Lew, Rep. Chu’s nephew, brought heightened attention to the problem of military hazing over the last year. Sadly, his is only one of the more well-known instances.

Private Danny Chen was reportedly tormented about his race and suffered physical abuse from basic training until his suicide in Afghanistan last October.

In May 2011, Private Hamson Daniels McPherson, Jr., committed suicide after facing near constant racial hazing.

A year earlier, Army Specialist Brushaun Anderson shot himself after enduring verbal harassment and being forced to wear a plastic trash bag at all times.

In June 2011, the Coast Guard punished seven crew members of a cutter after a two-year investigation into sexual hazing.

On April 25, 2012, Army Specialist Jarrett Wright made public the sexual abuse he endured after joining a unit that called itself “Crazy Troop.” According to Jarrett, all newcomers experienced some sort of initiation, but he was the only one brave enough to go public.